An Overview of Conservation Policy

Growth Management Act

In 1990, in response to concerns about increases in population, unchecked suburban sprawl, mounting traffic congestion and the impacts this rapid growth had on forest and agricultural lands and critical areas, such as wetlands and wildlife habitat areas, the state Legislature passed the Growth Management Act (GMA). The GMA required the fastest growing counties and their cities to plan comprehensively and cooperatively for future growth. Since then, all jurisdictions within the Puget Sound region have worked together to plan collaboratively for our future.

The GMA provides much of the land-use and regulatory framework necessary to accomplish salmon recovery under Endangered Species Act (ESA). The GMA requires that all urban counties and their cities develop and adopt comprehensive plans and regulations to implement these plans. The goals of the GMA emphasize conservation of resource lands, protection of critical areas, and coordination among neighboring jurisdictions concurrent with the accommodation of the projected growth. For further discussion of the GMA, see Chapters 4 and 7 of this report, as well as the Chapter 5 Appendix 5.1.

VISION 2020

More than a decade ago, a planning process was initiated in 1987 by the Puget Sound Regional Council, a regional growth and transportation planning agency for King, Kitsap, Pierce and Snohomish counties and their cities. This process resulted in the adoption of VISION 2020, which provides the policy framework for our regional growth strategy today. The VISION 2020 process was initiated prior to the adoption of the state's Growth Management Act in 1990, but is consistent with and supported by the goals of the GMA. That growth strategy envisions that growth will be concentrated into urban areas to protect rural and resource lands. The urban areas are further designated into urban centers to capitalize on the use of existing infrastructure, create opportunities to make our transportation system more efficient, and better leverage investment dollars.

Countywide Planning Policies

To achieve coordinated and consistent planning efforts, the GMA required that counties and the cities within them develop a set of framework policies to guide development of the comprehensive plans of each jurisdiction. The Countywide Planning Policies define the countywide vision and establish the parameters of the King County Comprehensive Plan as well as the comprehensive plans for each city in King County. The policies established the Urban Growth Area (UGA) and set direction for the County and cities about where growth is to be focused consistent with the GMA and the four-county regional VISION 2020 Plan.

King County Comprehensive Plan

The King County Comprehensive Plan provides policy guidance for managing growth in unincorporated King County. Protecting and restoring air

quality, water resources, soils, and habitats are among the County's primary goals. Several chapters of the Comprehensive Plan in particular establish the policy bases for our conservation efforts: Plan Vision, Land Uses, Natural Resource Lands, and Natural Environment. Many of our conservation programs are a result of the policy foundation established in the Comprehensive Plan. The following map shows King County's Unincorporated Areas.

Past and Continuing Salmon Conservation Programs

Over the years, King County has undertaken major efforts to protect salmon resources. These include watershed basin planning, water quality programs, studies on the potential use of water reuse, and open space and resource land purchases. Many local governments in King County have developed plans to protect rivers and control stormwater in five major watersheds. In just the past four years, more than $20 million has been invested to acquire critical habitat. We have implemented new regulations to improve protection of waterways, and have offered incentives to landowners so they will voluntarily protect critical habitat on their lands.

In order for a program to be included in this discussion and in the subsequent section on Early Actions, it must have conservation of salmon or their habitats as a first-order objective. The following describes King County's past and continuing efforts for salmon conservation.

Basin Planning Program History

The Basin Planning Program for King County Surface Water Management (SWM) Division (now the Water and Land Resources Division) began in 1987. It was formally concluded in 1995 when the Watershed Management Program was initiated. Implementation of basin plans developed during 1987-1995, was continued by staff in the Watershed Management Program as described below. This section describes the purpose, locations, process, schedule, funding, and transition of the Basin Planning Program to the Watershed Management strategy.

The purpose of the Basin Planning Program was to evaluate current and future conditions in drainage basins within the SWM service area – the unincorporated lands in the urbanizing western third of King County – and to evaluate and propose management plans for the surface waters in the basins. The plans were scientifically based, inter-disciplinary blueprints for the comprehensive management of surface water resources in the basins. The specific goals of the proposed management plans were:

- To restore hydrologic functions (mean and maximum flows and durations) to 1985 or pre-urban development conditions;
- To restore areas of existing water quality degradation and non-point source pollution (note that the water quality and non-point source pollution evaluation and management for the first three basin plans, Soos, Bear and Hylebos Creeks, was limited);
- To restore channel geomorphometry to protect existing fish habitat and areas of extreme erosion;

- To restore and/or create adequate drainage and conveyance systems to solve existing problems associated with urban development and to protect public and private property from drainage and conveyance problems associated with new urban development; and
- To develop regulations and programs to prevent future degradation of the physical, chemical (water quality) and biological structure and function of the surface waters within the basin planning area.

The Basin Planning Program evolved out of the Basin Reconnaissance Program which, using a scientifically based, interdisciplinary approach, evaluated the drainage and natural resources (including specific analysis of salmonid habitat) problems in the western urbanizing basins in King County during 1985-86. The findings of the Basin Reconnaissance Panel showed that significant drainage and natural resources problems existed in the western third of unincorporated King County.

The program findings served as the basis of the SWM services program, initiated by King County Council action in 1986. The findings suggested a priority for basin planning evaluations to first address the most rapidly urbanizing basins with high resources values, and secondly address more slowly urbanizing basins with lower resources values.

This priority led to the development of seven basin plans during the eight years of the program in the following order: Soos Creek (including Covington and Jenkins Creeks), Bear (and Evans) Creek, Hylebos Creek and Lower Puget Sound drainages, East Lake Sammamish Basin, Issaquah (and Tibbetts) Creek, Cedar River, and May Creek. A reduced or reconnaissance level of evaluation of problems and management needs was also completed during the eight years for the pre-dominantly unincorporated middle Green River drainage, Boeing Creek, and Swamp Creek. The Des Moines Creek Basin Plan was initiated by Basin Planning Program and inter-jurisdictional staff in 1995 but was completed by the Central Puget Sound Watershed Team. In all, the completed basin plans covered 96 percent of the SWM service area based on land acreage.

In areas where parts of the basin planning area were incorporated either prior to, or during, the basin planning process, interlocal agreements were developed to support policy coordination, technical review and cost sharing. Such interlocal agreements were developed for the Bear, Hylebos, Issaquah, Cedar and May Creek Plans.

The process for basin plan development involved three separate elements: evaluation of current and future conditions; evaluation of appropriate management options to meet the above goals; and community and technical review and involvement. The basin planning process was interdisciplinary and involved extensive field analysis of land and water resources, problems and solutions within the basin by land-use planners, geologists, hydrologists, ecologists, and engineers. Specific analysis of significant resource areas including salmonid habitat was included in the plan analysis of problems and solutions. A key element of the basin plans was the development of continuous flow hydrologic models for both current and future (zoned capacity) land use. The results of the modeling efforts were used to analyze future management options for the basins regarding drainage and habitat protection and restoration.

Typically, the plans recommended a three-part strategy for management that included regulatory, programmatic and capital solutions to solve existing and prevent future problems. The plans recommended drainage standards; sensitive areas standards (especially in regard to wetlands, riparian areas, and steep slopes); clearing and erosion control standards and best management practices (BMPs); water quality BMPs; zoning changes; technical assistance and stewardship programs; incentive programs for land management (e.g., current use taxation programs); capital projects to restore conveyance, drainage and habitat; and land acquisition in the later plans. Analysis of non-point source pollution problems and solutions was funded for the East Lake Sammamish, Issaquah and Cedar River Basin Plans under Centennial Grant Nonpoint Action Plan Program.

Analysis of current and future conditions and development of basin plan recommendations involved a substantial community and agency involvement process. Basin Advisory Teams, consisting of citizens within the basin, and Technical Advisory Teams, consisting of jurisdictional, state and tribal technical staff, participated in all aspects of the analysis of problems and evaluation of management options for the plans. In plans that included state funding for non-point source pollution control, Watershed Management Committees were forms to review and approve plan recommendations prior to submittal to the Washington Department of Ecology (DOE) following the mandates of WAC 400-12, for the development of non-point action plans.

All basin plans were adopted by the King County Council and, if appropriate, relevant city councils, as functional plans under the King County or relevant city Comprehensive Plan. Interlocal agreements were also developed to define implementation and funding responsibilities for basin plans that included incorporated areas. Basin stewards were hired to coordinate implementation of the adopted basin plans and to coordinate continuing involvement of the community in plan implementation.

The Basin Planning Program ended in 1995 following publication and adoption of the Status Report and Policy Recommendations (June 1994) and the Regional Needs Assessment Report and Recommendations (July 1995). These two documents concluded that the development and implementation of comprehensive basin plans by King County was no longer appropriate given the multi-jurisdictional nature of the majority of drainage basins in the county and the need to develop a multi-governmental approach to managing water quality, fish habitat and flooding, across whole watersheds and not just within single basins. The recommendations in these two documents led to the development of the inter-jurisdictional Watershed Forums and the development of the Regional Needs Assessment projects and programs and funding initiatives described in Chapters 7 and 8 of this report.

Habitat Restoration and Open Space Acquisitions

Under the Endangered Species Act, the highest priority of action is to conserve core areas of remaining, viable salmonid habitat and the watersheds critical to such habitat. Core salmon habitat and watershed lands can be permanently preserved through direct acquisition or purchase of conservation easements to provide the highest level of protection.

King County's resource lands acquisition program efforts over the past 30 years rivals that of any metropolitan region in America. The programs have preserved some of the critical "core" elements of our regional natural lands systems. Since the late 1960s, King County and its cities have enacted several major land acquisition programs that permanently preserved open spaces, farmlands and riparian habitat. While each of these programs has had a different focus, most of these lands preserved riparian habitat or beneficial watershed lands.

In all, since the late 1960s, King County and its cities have spent nearly $274 million to permanently preserve more than 29,000 acres of natural lands (see Table 1). Since 1990, more than $60 million in matching funds were obtained primarily from federal, state and city sources to purchase open space lands under the 1989 Open Space Bond, 1993 Conservation Futures Bond, and Waterways 2000. The other major public landowners are the State of Washington, with more than 85,000 acres of state Parks and Forests, and the United States Forest Service with 337,000acres, and municipal watersheds with more than 94,000 acres.

Table 1

Natural Lands Acquisition in King County-Since 1970
(3/1/99)

Programs	Amount	Acres Acquired	Funds Expended
COUNTYWIDE	**Total**	29,263	273,999,102
	Riparian	9,414	123,002,445
	Watershed	19,849	150,996,657
KING COUNTY	**Total**	26,542	162,769,776
	Riparian	7,660	71,665,774
	Watershed	18,882	91,104,002
CITIES	**Total**	2,721	111,229,326
	Riparian	1,753	51,336,671
	Watershed	967	59,892,655
ACQUISITONS BY WATERSHED			
Cedar/Lk. Washington	**Total**	7,166	138,108,603
	Riparian	4,548	60,849,016
	Watershed	2,618	77,259,587
Green River	**Total**	7,623	54,156,737
	Riparian	2,117	20,768,136
	Watershed	5,506	33,388,601
Puget Sound	**Total**	1,793	37,703,838
	Riparian	913	27,055,848
	Watershed	880	10,647,990
Snoqualmie	**Total**	10,779	36,797,895
	Riparian	1,836	14,329,445
	Watershed	8,943	22,468,450
White	**Total**	1,902	7,232,029
	Riparian		
	Watershed	1,902	7,232,029

Notes:

1. This list was not reviewed by cities or other agencies; This is preliminary information that can be updated.
2. The City totals included here reflect acquisitions from regional programs.
3. These figures represent information currently available to the King County RLOS Section.
4. This list likely represents much of the significant county and city open space acquisition activity in King County since 1970 to demonstrate the region's acquisition activity. There are, however, other acquisitions that are not reflected here.

Pre-1989 Programs

The following is a summary of major regional land acquisition programs within King County prior to 1990:

Forward Thrust (1969-1980): More than 4,000 acres of parks and 53 miles of waterfront were acquired in this far-ranging regional effort. Riparian habitat areas were acquired along corridors on the Cedar River, Soos Creek, May Creek, Coal Creek and the Sammamish River, along with numerous wooded parks that provide watershed protection functions. Many of these public lands offer an opportunity for habitat restoration. For example, more than 15 miles of publicly owned Sammamish River shoreline now is the setting for King County's volunteer native habitat restoration effort.

Farmlands Preservation Program (1980-1984): More than 12,000 acres of development rights were purchased on a voluntary basis to help save farming and preserve open space in King County. Located primarily in the Snoqualmie, Sammamish and Green River Valleys, these farmlands exclude further development harmful to salmon. King County also offers incentives to farmers to restore streamside habitat buffers and reduce agricultural runoff.

Programs since 1989

Since 1989, several nationally recognized resource lands acquisition programs have been implemented successfully by the King County Office of Open Space. (This office merged with another office in 1996 to become the County's Resource Lands and Open Space Section.)

Since early 1995, King County has focused more on salmon habitat-specific acquisitions, mainly under the largely completed Waterways 2000 pilot program. Waterways 2000 demonstrated that King County can successfully work with communities and landowners on a voluntary basis to preserve core salmon habitat areas. The program was limited to only six of 17 identified high-quality river basins for King County. (See following section for a discussion of Waterways 2000.)

The following is a summary of major, regional land acquisition programs within King County prior since 1989:

1989 Open Space Bond (1989-1997): More than 5,000 acres of open space was acquired in 116 projects under this program. Highlights included creation of Three Forks Park on the Snoqualmie River near North Bend, hundreds of acres of watershed preservation in the Issaquah Alps and more than 70 miles of regional trails.

1993 Regional Conservation Futures Acquisition Bond (1993-1997): This $60 million program permanently preserved more than 4,000 acres of open space through more than 60 projects by King County and its cities. All acquisitions were done on a voluntary basis.

Cedar River Legacy (since 1994): This program works in conjunction with the Cedar River Council to select habitat acquisition and restoration projects. It has no dedicated funding source. To date, approximately $7 million has